

3-2000

## Advancing from History's Hollow to History's Mountain: Sources on African American History in Texas

Alwyn Barr

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

[Tell us](#) how this article helped you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Barr, Alwyn (2000) "Advancing from History's Hollow to History's Mountain: Sources on African American History in Texas," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 38 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol38/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized editor of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu](mailto:cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu).

**ADVANCING FROM HISTORY'S  
HOLLOW TO HISTORY'S MOUNTAIN:  
SOURCES ON AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN TEXAS**

*by Alwyn Barr*

During a conference on Civil Rights in Austin at the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library in 1972, former President Johnson declared:

Until we overcome unequal history, we cannot overcome unequal opportunity. But to be black in a white society is not to stand on equal and level ground. While the races may stand side by side, whites stand on history's mountain and blacks stand in history's hollow ... It's time we get down to the business of trying to stand black and white on level ground.<sup>1</sup>

These words of Lyndon Johnson provide the theme of this essay: advancing from history's hollow to history's mountain. An important contribution to that advance will be the writing of more and better articles and books on African Americans in Texas. To produce those studies it is necessary to know about the source materials that are available and what additional materials should be collected.

Two essays offer starting points. In a bibliographical chapter on "Black Texans" in *A Guide to the History of Texas* (1988)<sup>2</sup> I described what had been written at that time. My historiographical essay, "African Americans in Texas: From Stereotypes to Diverse Roles," in *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (1991)<sup>3</sup> provides an analysis of books and articles as well as suggestions about topics in need of further research.

To pursue new research, writers must make full use of a wide range of original sources. Major newspapers of most cities and towns are useful, although they usually reflected bias against blacks until the mid-twentieth century. A good example of their effective use is Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas, 1874-1900* (1971). African American newspapers began to appear in the larger towns after the Civil War. Few copies from the late nineteenth century have been found; the discovery of others would be most enlightening. For the twentieth century the most valuable black newspapers are the *Houston Informer* and the *Dallas Express*, since extensive runs of each have been microfilmed and are available in major city and university libraries. The *Galveston City Times* and the *San Antonio Register* are available on microfilm for briefer periods. National black papers, such as the *Washington New Era* during Reconstruction, the *Indianapolis Freeman* late in the nineteenth century, and the *Chicago Defender* early in the twentieth century, contain accounts of events, persons, and communities in Texas. They, too, may be found on microfilm. Tuskegee Institute kept files of newspaper clippings from 1899 to 1966 on events involving African Americans, including those in Texas, that may be viewed on microfilm.

Several national African American magazines have published articles on

---

*Alwyn Barr teaches at Texas Tech University. He is a past president of the Texas State Historical Association.*

Texas in the twentieth century. *Crisis*, the voice of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, has carried discussions of civil rights issues and activities. In *Opportunity*, the National Urban League has mentioned economic and social concerns. *Ebony* has explored social events and focused on rising leaders, as did *Sepia*, published in Fort Worth for readers across the nation. The newspapers or magazines of various religious denominations are valuable for comments on churches and religious leaders.<sup>4</sup> Two topics that deserve further exploration through newspapers and magazines are literary efforts and sports activities.

Books and pamphlets also represent important printed sources. A few autobiographies have been written by black Texans, including Jeff Hamilton, *My Master* (1940; reprint 1993), by a slave of Sam Houston; J. Vance Lewis, *Out of the Ditch: True Story of an Ex-Slave* (1910), who became an attorney; Henry Flipper, *Negro Frontiersman* (1963; expanded edition 1997), by an army officer; and James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (1985), by one of its leaders. City directories provide useful information on individual occupations, businesses, churches, and schools. The directories for Dallas, Galveston, and San Antonio are on microfilm through 1900. Some volumes privately printed by blacks remain elusive but are extremely valuable for research. The *Red Book of Houston* (1915) offers sketches of individuals and institutions in the black community of that city. Other examples are H.T. Kealing, *History of African Methodism in Texas* (1885), W.A. Redwine, *Brief History of the Negro in Five Counties* (1901, reprinted in the *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas*, 1972), and Ira Bryant, *Negro Church of Houston* (1936). The centennial histories of many churches appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, but are little known outside the local community. Other volumes that fall into these categories need to be located, preserved, and possibly reprinted for wider use.

Related to printed sources are photographs that offer important insights about individuals, groups, homes and institutions, and clothing. Major collections are in the Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin, the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, and the archives at Texas A&M University. The Museum of African American Life and Culture in Dallas recently obtained the *Sepia Magazine Collection* of over 40,000 photographs that span 1945 to 1983.<sup>5</sup> Visual materials have not been published extensively, but good presentations are Lynne Adele, *Black History/Black Vision* (1989) and *Behold the People: R.C. Hickman's Photographs of Black Dallas, 1949-1961* (1994) which offer illustrations of work by African American artists and a photographer. A history of photographers and examples of their work appear in Alan Govenar, *Portraits of Community: African American Photography in Texas* (1996).

Studies of black material culture provide important insights into the clothing, furniture, and daily lives of people in earlier periods. Museums with valuable collections and exhibits include the Institute of Texan Cultures in San

Antonio, the George Washington Carver Museum in Austin, and the Museum of African American Life and Culture in Dallas. Archaeological work can supplement material culture collections with artifacts or careful restoration of historic sites. One possible example may be the work conducted at the Freedman's Cemetery in Dallas.<sup>6</sup> A study that clarifies the value of such efforts is Terry Jordan, *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (1982).

Oral history interviews have been gathered during the twentieth century to provide information not available in written records. The Federal Writers' Project during the 1930s collected narratives of former slaves who also offered information on emancipation and Reconstruction. Selections from these interviews were published by Ron Tyler and Lawrence Murphy as *The Slave Narratives of Texas* (1974, reprinted 1996). A multi-volume series edited by George Rawick, *The American Slave* (1972-1977), contains eleven volumes of interviews with former slaves in Texas. Their value is reflected in two important studies by Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas* (1989), and by James M. Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (1981). Other projects have focused on twentieth-century events and people. Ruth Edmonds Hill has edited *The Black Women Oral History Project* (1992) in eleven volumes that include interviews with Christia Adair of Houston and Juanita Craft of Dallas. The Oral History Collection at Baylor University has gathered unpublished interviews with black teachers, sports figures, and political leaders. East Texas State University and Texas Tech University have taped personal accounts by local black leaders in education, farming, and politics. Texans, including James Farmer of CORE and Juanita Craft of the Dallas NAACP, are among those who were interviewed for the Civil Rights Documentation Project at Howard University in Washington, D.C.<sup>7</sup> Probably the most extensive published example of a modern oral history project is Ruthe Winegarten, *I Am Annie Mae* (1983), based on interviews with a Dallas woman about her range of economic and civic activities. There is a need for additional oral history interviews, especially with African American musicians, such as those edited by Glen Alyn in *Mance Lipscomb: Grimes County Blues Master* (1993).

Researchers also should be aware of a variety of unpublished manuscript sources. First, there are public records at the local level. These include tax rolls, deed records, probate records, as well as county court and district court records – all useful for the history of slavery and for individuals and events after the Civil War. Campbell employed them skillfully in *Empire for Slavery*. For the post-1865 period, the records of city councils, health departments, and school boards are valuable sources for studies of topics such as education and law enforcement.<sup>8</sup>

State records are equally important. The Archives Division of the Texas State Library in Austin has several collections that relate to black history. There are lists of voters who registered during Reconstruction, records of the legislatures and constitutional conventions that had black members, and letters

to governors from black leaders and citizens. The papers of the Texas adjutant general provide material on the state police during Reconstruction and the militia that included black members, as well as on lynchings, segregation, and voting rights. Civil rights cases are among those in the records of the Texas Supreme Court. The Archives and Records Division of the Texas General Land Office holds information on land grants to free blacks who served in the Texas Revolution.<sup>9</sup> George Woolfolk used state records in his account of *The Free Negro in Texas* (1976). Further study could explore African American land acquisition in a state that controlled its public lands.

Records of the federal government are crucial for many African American topics. The primary depository, the National Archives in Washington, D.C., has a branch in Fort Worth that holds some original records for the South Central region as well as microfilm of several record groups in Washington. These include United States manuscript census returns, presently available up through 1920, which can provide biographical information on individuals and families such as occupation, age, place of birth, education, and, from 1850 to 1870, property holdings. Microfilm of these census returns also may be found in larger city and university libraries. The Federal Records Center in Fort Worth also contains military records of black soldiers and several rolls of microfilmed Freedmen's Bureau papers on Texas which offer insights into labor, violence, and education during Reconstruction. Barry Crouch elaborates on "Hidden Sources of Black History: The Texas Freedmen's Bureau Records as a Case Study," in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (January 1980). Other valuable records include those of the Federal Extension Service, which contain information on black and white farming and rural living conditions from 1909 to 1944. Records of the Fair Employment Practices Committee reveal job discrimination during World War II. Federal court records include civil rights cases from Texas. Another branch of the National Archives, the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, holds papers on the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the political career of Barbara Jordan, the first black member of Congress from Texas.<sup>10</sup> A study partially based on federal records is Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (1976).

Private papers of individuals and groups form another significant type of manuscript source. Public libraries and local historical societies contain several valuable collections. For example, the Metropolitan Research Center of the Houston Public Library has the papers of black businesses and churches, such as the Antioch Baptist Church materials, in the Vanita Crawford collection. The center also has papers of social organizations, including the City Federation of African American Women's Clubs. In the library are records of the Colored Trainmen of America and other labor unions, as well as papers of prominent families and individuals such as Christia Adair, a leading civil-rights advocate in Houston.<sup>11</sup> The Museum of African American Life and Culture in Dallas has collections on the political and social history of the community as well as the Bishop College Archives and a collection on black women in Texas. At the Dallas Public Library are some papers of Juanita

Craft, a Dallas city council member, and the records of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce. In the Dallas Historical Society may be found records of fraternal, educational, and business institutions, especially the Crawford Funeral Home. The Rosenberg Library in Galveston holds the papers of Leon Morgan, a black educator who was also active in cultural and religious endeavors. Records of slavery, schools, churches, and individuals, such as writer Ada Simonds, are available in the Austin Public Library.<sup>12</sup> Local history journals, especially the *Houston Review*, the *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas*, and *Legacies* in Dallas, have begun to publish more on these topics, but the need remains for further studies, especially of women's activities.

Universities and colleges also hold important collections of manuscripts. For example, the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin recently acquired the papers of James Farmer, a Texan who became the national leader of the Congress of Racial Equality. Other collections in the Center for American History include the papers of J.B. Rayner, a Populist political leader and later a college president; musician Mance Lipscomb; material on desegregation of the University of Texas at Austin; and some papers of Dallas civil-rights and political leader Juanita Craft.<sup>13</sup> A fine study based on such materials is Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (1993).

The Texas Collection at Baylor University holds the papers of nationally prominent singer Jules Bledsoe, the Farmers Improvement Society of Texas and its founder R.L. Smith, and various Waco political and civil-rights leaders. In the archives at the University of Texas at Arlington are the Lee Lewis papers, which include records of the Texas Federation Club, a black union group. The papers of Joseph Chatman, a president of the Lone Star Medical Association, are in the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University.<sup>14</sup>

The several colleges originally founded for black students are important because of their own archives and publications including catalogs. Prairie View A&M University also holds the records of the Interscholastic League and the Agricultural Extension Service for African Americans. Texas Southern University in Houston has established a Barbara Jordan Archives. The papers of W.R. Banks, a former president of both Texas College and Prairie View, are at Texas College in Tyler.<sup>15</sup> The best use of these materials has been by George Woolfolk in a study of *Prairie View* (1962) and by Michael Heintze in *Private Black Colleges in Texas* (1985).

Universities and libraries outside the state hold several manuscript collections on Texas topics. For example, the Bennett College library in Greensboro, North Carolina, holds the papers of N.W. Cuney, the late nineteenth-century Republican leader. The Fondren Library at Rice University has microfilm of the Cuney materials. Records of schools, churches, and ministers in Texas are among the records in the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee. Texas materials also are available in the records of the General Board of Christian Education for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., has two

collections important to Texans. The Booker T. Washington papers, now partially published, contain letters from state leaders such as Emmett J. Scott. The papers of the NAACP, some portions of which have been microfilmed, include materials on local chapters and leaders as well as significant legal cases such as *Nixon, Smith, and Sweatt*.<sup>16</sup> The best study based on those records is Darlene Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (1979).

Finally, many important manuscripts remain in private hands, including the papers of individuals, major fraternal organizations such as the Masons, local chapters of civil rights groups, women's clubs, labor unions, businesses, and church congregations. Some of these records need to be located. Other materials could be better preserved and used if they were placed in libraries. Papers that cannot be transferred to a library because of individual or group restrictions might be copied or microfilmed for greater use. All of these topics deserve further study.

The more extensive use of available sources and the discovery and preservation of new materials should lead to additional books and articles, especially on previously unresearched topics. Those publications in turn will help answer the call to advance studies of the African American community in Texas from history's hollow to history's mountain.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Life* (December 29, 1972), p. 16D.

<sup>2</sup>Light Townsend Cummins and Alvin R. Bailey, Jr., eds., *A Guide to the History of Texas* (New York, 1988), pp. 107-121.

<sup>3</sup>Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert, eds., *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station, 1991), pp. 50-80.

<sup>4</sup>Some of the magazines have been microfilmed and should be available in major city and university libraries, or through interlibrary loan.

<sup>5</sup>*Dallas Morning News*, December 15, 1990; Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, *Black Dallas in the 1950s: Photographs from the R.C. Hickman Archives* (Austin, 1987); Charles R. Schultz to A.B., March 27, 1986 (Texas A&M University Archives).

<sup>6</sup>Paula Eyrich Tyler and Ron Tyler, *Texas Museums: A Guidebook* (Austin, 1983); *Dallas Morning News*, October 5, 21, 1990 (Freedman's Cemetery).

<sup>7</sup>Jim Conrad to A.B., March 26, 1986 (East Texas State University); Rebecca Sharpless Jimenez and others, eds., *Baylor University, Institute for Oral History: A Guide to the Collection, 1970-85* (Waco, 1985).

<sup>8</sup>Some county records are available on microfilm through interlibrary loan from the Local Records Division of the Texas State Library in Austin.

<sup>9</sup>Michael R. Green to A.B., March 26, 1986 (Archives, Texas State Library); Michael Q. Hooks, "The General Land Office: Preserving Texas History Through Land Records," *Heritage 2* (Summer, 1985), pp. 8-11, 17.

<sup>10</sup>National Archives, *Black Studies: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* (Washington, 1984).

<sup>11</sup>Howard Beeth to A.B., March 27, 1986 (Houston Metropolitan Research Center); Cummins and Bailey, *Guide to the History of Texas*, p. 223; Texas State Historical Association, *Women and Texas History: An Archival Bibliography* (Austin, 1990), pp. 19-21.

<sup>12</sup>W. Marvin Dulaney to A.B., December 17, 1990 (Museum of African American Life and Culture); Museum of African American Life and Culture, *Preserving and Sharing a Precious Legacy*; Donald Payton to A.B., April 6, 1986 (Dallas Historical Society); Casey Edward Greene to A. B., April 5, 1986 (Rosenberg Library); May Schmidt, "Sources of Information Relating to Blacks in the Austin-Travis County Collection of the Austin Public Library" (1979); Cummins and Bailey, *Guide to the History of Texas*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>13</sup>Don E. Carleton to A.B., April 1, 1986 (Barker Texas History Center); Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, *Newsletter* (Fall, 1985), Spring, 1988); University of Texas at Austin, *Library Resources for the Study of African American History and Culture*; John Slate, "Sources for Black History at the Barker Texas History Center" (1991).

<sup>14</sup>University of Texas at Arlington, "Texas Black History Sources in the Archives," Texas State Historical Association, *Women and Texas History*, p. 66; Ellen Kuniyuki Brown to A.B., April 21, 1986 (Baylor University).

<sup>15</sup>Esther H. Baker, "Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Prairie View Interscholastic League of Texas" (1974); Texas Southern University Library, *The Special Collections*.

<sup>16</sup>Walter Schatz, ed., *Directory of Afro-American Resources* (New York, 1970).